Reviewing or retrieving:
What activity best promotes long-term retention?

by

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Research studies repeatedly emphasize the importance of vocabulary capabilities to a large variety of academic activities. This study compared a learning strategy that exclusively involved the visual review of vocabulary word-definition pairs to a strategy that, in addition, prompted participants to attempt free-recall retrieval of words to match specific definitions. This comparison attempted to identify which of the two strategies best produces longer-term attainment of vocabulary knowledge. A group of participants (N = 20) used a web-based system to take a pre-test over 21 relatively difficult SAT-review vocabulary words using a drag and drop graphical user interface. For each participant, the system then randomly assigned 7 of the words to a control treatment condition (no exposure), 7 of the words to a review treatment condition (visual display of the word-definition pairs), and 7 of the words to a retrieval treatment condition (visual display augmented with cycles of free-recall attempts) before guiding the participant through 4 timed treatment cycles. An immediate post-test over all 21 words was administered using the same graphical interface. Students returned at least 7 days later for a delayed final test. No significant difference was detected in that final assessment between the words receiving the retrieve treatment and the review treatment.
Dedication

To Michelle, Julia, Isaac, Evelyn, and Allison.

Psalm 20:4
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I pray that glimpses of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ’s character have been occasionally visible in my life in spite of my faults, follies, and foibles (2nd Corinthians 3:18).
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